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Watson's Art Journal,

A WEEKLY RECORD OF MUSIC, ART AND LITERATURE.

HENRY C. WATSON, EDITOR.

VOL. SERIES—No. 229.
NEW VIII.—No. 21.

NEW YORK, SATURDAY, MARCH 14, 1868.

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NEW YORK THEATRES.

BY MOLYNEUX ST. JOHN.

PART I.

WALLACK'S THEATRE.

Those who are fond of comparing the manners and customs of the English and Americans, may find a fruitful and legitimate field for their speculations in the theatre and drama of the two countries. Their individual tastes may differ, and their nationality may warp their judgment and opinions, but they will see differences and improvements, both in the arrangement of the houses and in the audiences who frequent them, that will in many instances place the elder country in the less favorable light. Unlike the system that exists in London of scattering the theatres, the plan adopted in New York has been to bring them as nearly as possible together, so that the overflow of one house finds another theatre at hand. Hence the New York houses are nearly all situated in the Broadway, and have therefore a continual stream

of life passing backward and forward before their doors; such a river of human particles as would strike envy into the hearts of those "spirited lessees," who, from time to time, have embarked their fortunes in the secluded byways of King street, St. James', or Soho. With some few exceptions the American theatres are not distinguishable from the surrounding houses, until a close proximity reveals the name, lights, and other outside paraphernalia of a place of amusement; for on either side the spacious entrance are usually to be found shops or cafés, and above the windows of an hotel or retail store. In this respect, though in very puny proportions, the Strand Theatre bears more resemblance to a New York house than any other at present open in London; and the dingy smoke discolored stucco building, so familiar to English playgoers, has no counterpart within the limits of Manhattan Island. An American theatre is constructed with a view to obtaining as much fresh air and ventilation as is consistent with an absence of draughts, and a due provision for warmth in the winter season. The ventilator is usually a large circular grating, placed in the centre of the roof, as may be seen at Astley's, a theatre rebuilt by Mr. Dion Boucicault on principles somewhat the same as those of American houses, of which he had an intimate knowledge. The internal decoration of a theatre depends of course on the taste and fancy of the proprietor, but the arrangement of the auditorium, and the relative distinction of places, is based on the same principle in all.

Putting aside opera houses for the moment, and speaking only of those establishments devoted to dramatic representations, there is no theatre in New York, in size and magnificence of construction, on a par with Drury Lane; but old Drury apart, London has no theatre that can equal "Wallack's" in comfort, size, and beauty combined. This theatre ranks first among its brethren in New York, and is considered to be the Transatlantic home of "genteel comedy." It is somewhat of the shape and size of the Adelphi in London, and in the matter of a steady popularity attaching to the house, runs side by side with that establishment; but there all resemblance ends. The narrow entrance, the disagreeable squeezing which has to be undergone in getting out of the Adelphi is a painful contrast to the roomy vestibule and folding gates at "Wallack's," and other theatres across the Western Ocean, while the stage appointments, which have made the words "Adelphi Guests" and "Adelphi scenery" synonymous in the theatrical world

for shabbiness and absurdity, are contrasted at Wallack's with a completeness of scenery, dresses, and properties, that is almost unknown in those English theatres from which the pieces played in America are generally borrowed. The last named house is situated in that part of the Broadway immediately before its intersection at Union Square, and like other New York theatres, is surrounded, above and below by shops and similar places of business. There are two entrances to the theatre—broad, high, handsomely decorated and beautifully lighted—meeting in a roomy hall, from which radiate entrances into all parts of the house, affording easy access, and quick and ready egress in case of fire. On one occasion when the house was very full it was tried how long the audience would be in getting away, without any alarm of fire being given, or other reason for expedition, and it was found that in four minutes and a half the theatre was empty. It would be exceedingly difficult for a lady occupying a centre stall in a London house, to make her way out of the place in anything like that time; and although Mr. Boucicault, Mr. Oxenford, and other writers, have more than once called attention to this subject, still, in the majority of English theatres the audience are so "cribbed, cabined, and confined," that were a fire of any consequence to break out, many people would inevitably be suffocated or crushed to death in the rush and consequent block that must ensue in the present limited means of egress.

Passing the check gate in the hall at Wallack's, the visitor either enters the parquet by one of three large doors that stand open at the back, or turns to the right or left to the stairs that lead to the balcony or family circle. The auditorium is here divided into three prices—speaking in theatrical parlance—from which there is no reduction for late arrivals—herein, by the way, like the Adelphi—and of these prices the highest is charged for the "orchestra chairs," (stalls,) while the "balcony," (dress circle,) and parquet are a little cheaper, and the family circle the lowest price of all. The parquet, which corresponds in position with the English pit, is as comfortable as any part of the theatre; the seats are lined and backed with velvet, so that the most fastidious can sit and watch the performance in ease and comfort. No visitor here need be afraid of finding himself between two old women, one of whom comments on the play by sympathizing with the heroine, and abusing the villain of the piece, while the other regales herself with oranges and ginger beer, as if there was no hereafter. Neither need he dread the advent of sharp-boned females vending their unwholesome wares, who pertinaciously demand room to pass, and use the knees of the unwary as tables for their baskets. There is no necessity for this most objectionable custom in New York, inasmuch as a lady and gentleman can leave their seats, although unnumbered and unreserved, and adjourn whither they will for refreshment, knowing that when they return, should they find their places occupied, an intimation that they have been already appropriated will be at once attended to. The orchestra chairs which divide the area with the parquet, though the best, or, at least, the most expensive seats in the house, claim no social superiority for their occupants, as in England. Between the English pit and stalls yawns a social gulf that money alone will hardly bridge; and while members of the upper strata of society

repose in the stalls in happy consciousness of their own superiority, a stray mortal whose customary place is in the pit, but who, from a plethora of cash, may have wandered into the regions of the great, has but a sorry time of it. Surrounded by those whose dress and appearance differ widely from his own, his neighbors talking over him, round him, and across him, on subjects of which he knows nothing, the unhappy intruder wishes himself back in the pit or other less aristocratic quarter, and pines for those localities where liberty is unshackled by fashion. In New York all is different; a man selects the orchestra chairs or parquet as he feels inclined, and more with reference to his own powers of vision, or the acoustic properties of the house, than to any social considerations. The occupants of the chairs on one evening, may be in the parquet the next; and if the bonnets are a little brighter, the dresses more resplendent, that is probably the only difference that exists between the two places. A visitor to one of the first class theatres of New York, is on an equality with those around him. He admits no superiority to himself, infers no inferiority; he has paid his money and does exactly as he pleases, and sits precisely where he fancies, always provided that he is not annoying other people, for nowhere are men more considerate towards the convenience or requests of their fellows than in a New York theatre, and the cheerful alacrity with which they yield their seats to ladies on the slightest hint, would teach a wholesome lesson to those at home who fall short of that combination which we call an English gentleman. Above and around the area comprising orchestra chairs and parquet, runs the balcony or dress circle, admission to which is the same price as to the parquet, and therefore open to all who choose to exchange their places in the lower for others in the higher range of seats. Over this again is the family circle, the cheapest part of the house, but, withal, as clean, orderly, and well-arranged as other higher priced localities. These two circles carry their sweep round the house, almost unbroken by private boxes, which in these theatres are generally very limited in number. Gallery and pit, in the English sense of the word, there is none; their places are occupied as before described, and the roughs, male and female, either array themselves in decent clothes and manners, and take their seats in the family circle, or, manners and clothing failing them, wing their flight to the Bowery Theatre or some other place where shirt sleeves and "Plug" are looked upon with less objection.

"Wallack's" Theatre was built by the late James Wallack, an Englishman, and the famous Don Cesar De Bazan, who established himself in America some years ago, passing from actor to manager in New York, where he died in 1864. Lester Wallack, the present proprietor, succeeded his father both as an actor and a manager, and in the latter capacity has established a reputation for his theatre which has placed it at the head of all similar establishments in America. His house is the prettiest in New York, his company is generally considered to be the best, no pains are ever spared, neither is expense calculated in the pieces brought out at this theatre; and an Englishman sees, with some slight feelings of wounded pride, that dramas, comedies, and burlesques, English in their birth and origin, treating of English homes and scenes, are more carefully mounted and

more perfectly put upon the stage in a New York theatre, than in those houses where they were originally produced. These causes have had the effect of making Wallack's Theatre the fashionable house, though the *habitués* in no way neglect other places that may have attractions to offer. As a rule, the fact of a new artist being engaged, or a new piece being produced at this theatre, is tantamount to a public acknowledgment of merit, and although "*Nemo mortalium omnibus horis sapit*," and the audience occasionally decline to endorse the managerial opinion, yet such instances are rare: for the public, trusting the judgment of "Wallack's" management, usually acknowledge and support the selections made by their friend and *impresario*. This feeling has its drawbacks as well as its advantages, and compels the manager to weigh carefully the merits of any new artist or piece that he may propose to bring out. A striking example of this occurred a few months since, when Mr. Wallack, returning from London, brought with him the two pieces which together had been the great success of the year, and which had been running for many months to crowded houses in one of the Metropolitan theatres. The fashion of New York decided that there was no merit in either of the works, and declared that one of them, a burlesque, was unworthy of Wallack's Theatre. They had no doubt it was funny and clever, and in its proper place might be attractive, but they would none of it, so after a run of three weeks the bill was changed.

Burlesques are not so often played at the New York Theatres as in London; and the American public do not care for them at all in the same degree as do their cousins of England. There is but one house devoted to burlesque throughout New York, and this only a converted hall: a pretty little theatre, but, nevertheless, having the air of a hall hanging over it still. Here (the Fifth Avenue Theatre) burlesques form the evening's amusement, oftentimes two being played successively—a mismanagement of effect, strange, and difficult to comprehend; but though two or three of the company are talented and clever, the *tout ensemble* lacks that completeness and pull-all-together spirit which makes the performance of a good burlesque so attractive in London. As yet, too, there are but few burlesques, comparatively speaking, that have been written for this side, and it requires little explanation to understand that puns, jokes, and allusions, that are immensely funny in one country, may be tame and insipid when repeated in another, three thousand miles away. This law of comic literature necessitates alterations and substitutions which, as they depend on the literary ability of the actor who makes them, do not always surpass the original either in elegance of diction, refinement of ideas, or depth of humor; in other words, the fun of the play is obliged to be supplemented by impromptu gagging, a liberty that can be entrusted to very few actors without a certainty of spoiling the performance and the tempers of all those engaged in it. At the "Olympic," on the Broadway, burlesque finds a home when Mrs. John Wood is in America, but as that lady has been for some time in England, the theatre, for the nonce, has been given over to the drama and Mr. Jefferson, of whom mention will be made in another part.

One of the largest theatres in New York, and certainly one of the most admirably ar-

ranged is that known by the name of "Niblo's Garden," a title which, to English ears, is suggestive of a second rate theatre, used as an additional attraction to the garden in which it is placed. Such an idea, however, in this case would be utterly erroneous, as Niblo's Garden is built within the walls of the Metropolitan Hotel, and owes its existence solely to its dramatic capabilities, and nothing to its garden, which is merely a small and insignificant adjunct to the theatre. Part and parcel of the "Metropolitan," it has, from either side of its large and handsome entrance, a side-way into the hotel, which serves as a convenience and attraction to the number of visitors living round and over the theatre, and also helps to brighten the entrance and make it more attractive to passers by. The chief peculiarity in the construction of this theatre is the arrangement or position of the lower circle, which the visitor reaches immediately on emerging from the outer hall, and which gives the theatre an appearance more foreign to our accustomed notions than any other in New York, at the same time excelling them in convenience. Imagine the dress circle of a theatre lowered bodily down from its height above, placed at the upper end of a slope which falls away to the orchestra, and divided by a number of passages running longitudinally through the circle, doors corresponding to these passages, with an antechamber running all round, having sofas placed at intervals against the walls, and some idea of the novelty referred to will thus be gained. The advantage derived, playgoers can measure for themselves by reflecting whether they prefer the pit-boxes at Covent Garden to others still higher; but the facility afforded for leaving and returning to one's seat by means of the dividing alleys and easy exit, would be thoroughly appreciated by every one in England if managers would only be good enough to arrange their theatres on this plan. However late a visitor may arrive at this house, he can reach his seat with comparative ease, and avoidance of that torture which a man inflicts upon himself by squeezing past a long row of people, whose ill-concealed looks of annoyance he is obliged to meet with a painful smile of apology, knowing that he is regarded with feelings akin to those that would be entertained for a wet dog. Once seated in London, he is more or less fixed for the evening, and is compelled to occupy his time in the intervals between the acts, by studying the heads of his neighbors and wondering whether there is any one in the house whom he knows.

In a New York theatre there may be, and often is, a stampede for refreshments; couples run a few yards along the Broadway to the nearest restaurant, or into the refreshment saloon of the theatre, and allowing themselves half a minute to get from thence into their places, are comfortably seated when the curtain rises. Perhaps this difference in the construction of the theatres in the two countries may necessitate the number of private boxes in England, and account for their paucity in America, for with the exception of the French Theatre, the proscenium boxes are usually the only ones to be seen in New York. At Niblo's the other arrangements of the theatre are similar to those at Wallack's; and indeed at all the leading houses, the front half of the area being devoted to "orchestra chairs," the rear-most portion to the parquet. Down the centre of both runs a passage, like the old fop's alley

of Her Majesty's Theatre, a convenience that was sacrificed to the desire of utilizing, in a pecuniary point of view, the space thus left open. Above the parquet circle are placed the balcony and family circle, differing more in name and position than in real comfort.

"ON MUSIC."

TRANSLATED BY ARTHUR MATTHISON, ESQ.

Where'er throughout this mundane sphere,
With dulcet tone, fair music lifts her voice,
As by enchantment, from the human heart,
She bears away its pangs;
Celestial attributes she owns,
And unto man, with heavenly sounds,
Recalls his immortality!
Thoughts born of earth no more oppress his heart;
O'er his rapt soul she pours the oblivious wave;
His sorrows melt, and in his wounds, with grace divine,
She sheds a pure and holy balm!

From the German of Schiller.

Oh, harmony! the Gods' dear gift to man,
How thrills my soul at thy supreme command!
How to my heart thy liquid numbers speed;
Thy many tongues of beauty speak,
And sweet discourses make of joy celestial!

Spread thy resplendent wings,
Bright child of Heaven!
Float through the listening air,
And, with benignant voice,
Breathe thy rich blessings o'er the longing Earth!

Children of Earth! hear ye the song divine,
And grateful thank all-bounteous Heaven
Who gives ye music!

From the Italian of Montelli.

Music! 'tis a generous wine!
As its sweet waves flow in our veins
Our hearts more lightly bound,
And our eyes shine the brighter!
Like healing balm it softens our griefs;
It exalteth the courage of heroes,
And giveth to love its conquering language!
'Tis music that bears us from Earth
To the broad clear fields of blue Æther;
Or, like lotus, soft blooming from out the deep waters,
It expands into beautiful dreams.

From the French of Auguste Barbier.

A Liverpool paper publishes the "Complaint of the Parish Clerk of St. Vitus against Ritualism," in which the worthy individual gives vent to the following doggrel lines as to the musical part of the subject:

"And the music, it's altered, I can't tell you how,
But the old Psalms o' David we never see now;
They've got some new Hymns, with some very queer words,
And they twitter and pipe like a parcel of birds.
They tell me it's grand, and I shouldn't complain,
But I long for the old Psalms o' David again;
Or else for our godly and Protestant lays—
Not those dreadful quick chants of these Ritchelist ways."

[From Carl von Hottel's *Charpie*.]

REMINISCENCES OF CARL MARIA VON WEBER.

[CONCLUDED.]

It was in the gentle autumnal sunshine that I met on the Dresden Terrace a fair and popular singer with her husband. I had made their acquaintance some months previously in Silesia, and they were now staying for a short time in Dresden, on their return from a long professional tour. We immediately arranged to meet that same night at Chiapone's Cellar; we agreed to go there after the play to have macaroni and oysters. As soon as this weighty business was arranged, we walked on chatting with each other. I described the recent enthusiasm in the theatre, Weber's reception, and my own delight. My fair companion heard all I had to say, but made no observation. In the evening, as I was waiting beneath the cosy arched roof which had looked down upon so many merry artistic meetings that it had obtained a classical reputation—as I was discussing with friend Chiapone the details of the little banquet, and standing in readiness to receive my guests—the door opened, and the Master hobbled in, arm in arm with the lovely creature who had made so glorious a creation of his Agatha, and was so fond of appearing in the part. "I have invited myself," he said, "I, also, belong, so to speak, to the gang."

That was indeed a night! Thirty-one years have since elapsed, but, if I could only spend it over again, I should be, I believe, again young. There were six or seven of us. Ludwig Robert, with his Juno-like wife, was also in Dresden. I should be telling the most atrocious falsehood were I to assert that the conversation was long maintained at the pitch which learned, intellectual, moral, and wise persons set up as the acme of well-bred social dignity. This was not Weber's kind of conversation. He could be serious enough, if necessary, but at the proper season for giving way to mirth, for joking merrily and without restraint, he abandoned himself fully to the impulse of the moment; he became childlike, and his pleasing example exercised a magic effect upon any one with a grain of humor in his composition who happened to sit near him. Of the humorous nonsense he could speak himself, and make his neighbors speak, fine, shoulder-shrugging orators, phrase-makers, and liquorice-tongued talkers, have not the slightest notion; and it is quite correct that they should not have.

Weber was one of those few musicians with whom scientific education, varied aspirations, and preponderating intelligence do not injure the creative flow of original melody, or impose any learned restraint upon natural talent. He was one of those rare beings who, in the intercourse of friendship, in the mutual interchange of opinions and views, in no way show off their intellectual superiority, but, with amiable good humor and gentleness, take care that every one near them shall have an opportunity of exhibiting his own little light. Suggestive, attentive, and entertaining, Weber guided his opponent, if any dispute arose in the course of the conversation, to the point whence menacing dispute could be led easily and aptly into the sphere of jocular, and, through the latter, to a peaceful conclusion. There was but one subject which formed an exception. In one matter alone was the great man little; the name of one person only was able